



The Transformative Impact Of Economic Recession On Human Resource Management Practices In Public Secondary Schools In Delta State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the transformative impact of economic recession on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State. Specifically, the study ascertained the human resource management practices in public secondary schools, found out the indices of economic recession in public secondary schools, and identified the transformative impact of economic recession on human resource management practices in public secondary schools. Three research questions were raised and answered while two hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study to achieve the set goal. The study employed the ex-post-facto correlational survey design. A sample of 218 principals, drawn from a population of 491 principals through stratified proportionate random sampling technique, from the three senatorial districts of Delta State was used for the study. Data was gathered using a self-designed questionnaire. The data gathered was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the three research questions, and linear regression was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that economic recession had no significant transformative impact on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Keywords: Transformative Impact, Economic Recession, Human Resource Management Practices, Public Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Any adverse situation that provokes an entity or system to change, for the purpose of survival or continual efficiency, indirectly contributes to the transformation of that entity or system. This is how economic recession in a country could impact different organisations including the public secondary school system eliciting changes, as a means of adapting to the adverse situation within the system. These changes could be in various sectors including the human resource management sector, in its practices, in such a manner that can be considered transformational. This is the driving force behind the researchers' curiosity to see how the current harsh economic situation in Nigeria has had transformative impact on human resource management practices and response strategies in public secondary schools in Delta State.

When economic activity diminishes across the economy of a country for a period of more than a few months evidenced by a drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment rate, industrial production and net sales the country is said to be in economic recession (National Bureau of Economic Research as cited by Evans, Schwab & Wagner, 2019). Economic recession can be caused by internal or external factors. The internal factors are those that have to do with the way the economy of a country is

managed. The external factors are those that are external to the economy; these are not within the control of the managers of the economy. These factors include natural disasters, climate change, violent conflicts, unexpected fall in the price of a country's main product, especially for countries whose revenues are hinged on one product, effects from decisions taken by other countries like product boycotts as well as trade disruptions occasioned by war or other issues. Also, because of the interconnected nature of the world, economic recession could be global, starting from a major economy and spreading to other economies that do business with the major economy. Sometimes economic recession is triggered by both internal and external factors.

Economic recession in a country has negative impact on individuals, homes, business organisations and non-profit organisations prompting various levels of adjustment. Through these adjustments the effect of economic recession is mitigated. Governments also take economic measures such as lowering interest rates, giving tax holidays and grants to companies to boost production and lower inflation rate to nudge the economy out of recession and trigger economic expansion. Economic recessions could last for a few months to a few years depending on how it is managed. When it is more severe and prolonged it becomes economic depression as was the case with the great depression that started in 1939 and lasted for about ten years.

Economic recession is a problem many countries have been battling with in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic which broke out in December, 2019, at Wuhan, China. Some measures taken to combat the pandemic, such as social distancing and outright lockdowns in some instances affected economic activities worldwide. The slowdown of economic activities in effect led to a fall in demand for oil which invariably led to a fall in oil prices (Ozili, 2021). This, of course, had negative implications for oil producing countries, especially a mono-product economy like Nigeria whose main export is oil. Even though COVID-19 pandemic is more or less over, many countries including Nigeria are yet to fully recover from the economic downturn it left in its wake. The Russian-Ukraine war which started in February 2022 also had its effect on the global economy. According to Gajigo (2022), this is because the war led to disruptions in global supply chains especially as it concerns oil, agricultural products such as corn, wheat, and fertilizers.

The economic situation of Nigeria, however, can be said to have been bad for a while even before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the war between Russia and Ukraine. This is not to mean that the country has been perpetually in recession for a while but rather has been swinging in and out of recession. According to Mba (2021), Nigeria has suffered eight economic recessions since its independence in 1960. The first was in 1967, followed by the second in 1975, then the third in 1978, the fourth in 1981, the fifth in 1982, the sixth in 1983, the seventh in 2016 and the eighth in 2020.

Schools, especially public schools, being non-profit organisations may not have the same operational dynamics as business organisations. But they, however, need proper funding to be able to accomplish their objectives effectively. Public secondary schools in Nigeria are managed by the federal or state government through the relevant ministry of education or state school and their agencies supported by the principals of the school. Public secondary schools in Delta State are managed by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and their agencies and the principals of the schools. Economic recession in the country will also affect Delta State because the monthly allocation that the state receives will also fall as the country's revenue falls, meaning that the state will also need to make adjustments to manage the available resources. Funding of public secondary schools by the state will invariably reduce which will have far reaching effects on the employment of teachers, provision of school infrastructure, payment of teachers' salaries and other things that have to do with finance, creating difficulties for principals as regards the overall management of the schools and particularly human resource management.

The management of public secondary schools in Delta State has two components: the internal and the external component. The school Principal is the internal school manager while the Ministry of Education (and its agencies) constitute the external component. Public secondary schools in Delta state suffer the impact of economic recession in the country because of dependence on government funding, and have to make adjustments in human resource management practices to be able to accomplish their set goals. It is

therefore important to find out the transformative impact of the current economic recession on human resource management practices and response strategies in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Human resource management in education encapsulates the practises and methods by which staff in the school are integrated and maintained for the purpose of achieving the goals and objectives of the school (Omebe, 2014). In the public secondary school system in Nigeria, the Ministry of Education through the Post-Primary Education Board and the civil service commission plays some roles in human resource management. These include staff recruitment, selection, development, transfers, promotions, and discipline, dismissal, retirement and payment of salaries and pensions (Otu, 2016). Procurement (recruitment and selection) of staff is a key role of human resource management in the public secondary school system because the schools need sufficient and competent teachers and support staff to be able to accomplish set objectives and goals to educate students to the required standard as enshrined in the National Policy on Education as well as accomplish the mission and vision of the school (Jimoh, Sa'ad & Alasoluyi, 2021).

The human resource management practices carried out by the public secondary school principal include a little role in staff recruitment and selection, staff professional development, performance management, compensation and benefits, improving the work environment, policy implementation, conflict resolution, teacher retention and resource management, (Mgbodile as cited by Agugu & Bua, 2019).

Staff development is a function the principal has a lot to do with, whether in encouraging the staff to develop themselves through external programmes or through organising orientation programmes for the staff. The principal often takes up the role of guiding and supporting teachers whose training falls below the required standard (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds & Buskey, 2017). This is sometimes done through classroom observations to evaluate and identify areas of a staff's deficiency to see how to help in improving the staff's skill. The role of the principal is therefore important in the overall human resource management practices in public secondary schools as it concerns adapting to financial constraints caused by economic recession. Indeed, for a secondary school to be efficiently managed, especially in periods of social-economic downturn, a lot depends on the capability of the principal (Anho, 2017).

Similarly, in Anho (2022) human resource management is described as involving school heads using administrative motivation aimed at meeting workers/lecturers physiological, social and self-actualization needs which helps to spur and direct their actions, thus propelling them to utilize their energies and abilities towards maximal attainment of institutions' objectives.

Statement of the Problem

All public secondary schools in Delta State, apart from the federal government colleges, are managed by the Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. It means that the funding of the schools is majorly a responsibility of the state government. There are four hundred and ninety-one public secondary schools managed by the Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education portal, May 2024). The provision of school infrastructure, equipment, general learning/teaching materials, payment of teachers' salaries, and general maintenance of the schools are funded by the state government. This is not an easy task for the government seeing that there are other needs to take care of financially by the state.

The state's financial capacity is greatly dependent on the monthly allocation that comes from the federal government. If therefore the federal government's income falls because of fall in oil prices and revenue, the state may equally be affected. It is therefore not unexpected that education funding will suffer during the time of economic recession which, of course, will affect the infrastructure, availability of equipment and learning materials, general maintenance, employment of teachers, payment of teachers' salaries, promotion of teachers, and training and development of teachers as it concerns the secondary schools in Delta State. In a situation like this a lot therefore rests on the principal of each of the schools to be able to manage the available resources so as to accomplish the goals of the school in spite of reduction in government funding.

The impact of the economic recession on the general population, teachers and students alike, has been intense since the economic recession of 2020 following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Situations

further worsened in 2022 with the start of the Russian-Ukraine war. The removal of fuel subsidy on May 29, 2023, caused a 210.31 percent increase in the price of petrol (according to the National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This change in the price of petrol had a domino effect on the cost of transportation and the price of goods and services bringing intense hardship on the people. The floating of the naira at about the same time led to a steep fall in the value of the naira spiking inflation rate and compounding the problems of the people.

In a situation like this, astute management of the human resources in a secondary school becomes very important and the school principal may need to make genuine efforts to maximise the use of available resources, exploring different options and veering from the regular practice, to surmount the challenges of the times. The researchers, therefore, wonder how these challenges caused by economic recession has impacted human resource management strategies employed by principals to get teachers to continue to do their work effectively to accomplish the goals of public secondary schools in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the profiled human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta state?
2. What are the indices of economic recession in public secondary schools in Delta State?
3. What are the transformative impacts of current economic recession on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Economic recession has no significant link with human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between the transformative impact of economic recession and human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study takes its inspiration from the systems theory proposed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1947. The general systems theory highlights the interconnectedness between different elements and entities in the world, concretising the fact that no entity exists in isolation but belongs to a bigger system which it affects and which affects it. This theory steers the level of analysis from the individual entity to a more holistic level upstaging simplistic linear thinking. According to Lai and Lin (2017), the systems theory aims to amplify the dynamic relationships and interdependence between the components of a system. In line with the systems theory, the world is considered as an overall system (supra-system) where different countries are part of the system; different states within a country are sub-systems of the country, different organisations within a state including the secondary school system are subsystems of the state.

According to Peretomode (2019) the secondary school system is considered a social system. A social system is also an open system where there is continual relationship between the organisation and the environment. This, according to Boulding, Kahz and Khan (as cited by Mele, Pela and Polese, 2010) underscores an organisation's ability to adapt to changes in its environment. Just as a country will respond to changes in the global financial environment, the state will also respond to changes in the state's financial environment, ditto the secondary school system. This attribute of an organisation or system within a supra-system to carry out a responsive change to maintain equilibrium in the face of a change in the supra-system is the spring from which innovations, improvisations and transformative changes are made possible in the internal machinery of a system in the face of a crisis. The school therefore is an adaptive system that must respond to changes both within it, in the attitudes and dispositions of its staff, as well as its external environment to be able to continually meet its set goals. According to Parsons (as cited by Tittenbrun, 2014), for a system to survive or maintain equilibrium in

relation to its environment, it must adapt to that environment, continue to attain its goals, ensure proper integration of its components and maintain its latent pattern.

METHODOLOGY

The research design that was used for this study is the *ex-post facto* design using the descriptive correlational survey method. The population of the study comprised the principals of all the public secondary schools in Delta State from the three senatorial districts: Delta South (193), Delta Central (177) and Delta North (121), a total of four hundred and ninety-one (491). A sample size of 218 principals was picked from the population for the study through stratified proportionate random sampling technique. The research instrument used is a self-designed questionnaire titled: “Assessment of Transformative Impact of Economic Recession on Human Resource Management Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State Questionnaire” (ATIERHRMPPSSDSQ).

The instrument is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A contains demographic questions pertaining to the respondents, while section B is made of five parts – B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5 which have items to generate data bearing the purpose of the study in mind. The questionnaire was designed in a four (4) points scale format with options as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. The validity of the instrument was determined by three experts from the Department of Educational Management and Foundations in the Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka. The instrument was also subjected to reliability test using test-retest method using Pearson Product Moment correlation which yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.93, indicating high reliability. The data generated from the respondents was collated and analysed using descriptive statistics of percentage, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions using a benchmark of 2.50 and above as the acceptance level for agree while below 2.50 was for disagree. Linear regression was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Of the 218 questionnaires given out only 213 were returned and used for the study.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the profiled human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation Analysis on Human Resources Management Practices as perceived by Principals

Descriptive Statistics

ITEMS	N	Mean	SD	Decision
Vacancies for teachers are duly advertised in the newspaper or radio before they are filled.	213	2.12	.96	Disagree
Proper certificate screening is carried out in the process of recruitment and selection (employment) of staff to ensure that only qualified candidates are employed as teachers in public secondary schools.	213	3.13	.71	Agree
Principals play a significant role in the recruitment and employment of teachers.	212	1.75	.84	Disagree
Teachers are posted to a school at the request of the principal to meet the schools' requirement	213	2.23	.89	Disagree
Teachers are paid as and when due	213	3.39	.64	Agree
Principals play a significant role in the promotion of teachers	213	2.37	.89	Disagree
Bonuses are paid to hardworking teachers	213	1.55	.74	Disagree
Teachers are sent for training regularly in public secondary schools in Delta State.	213	2.10	.67	Disagree
Principals facilitate in-service training and mentoring programmes to enhance teachers' skills and competences	213	2.20	.73	Disagree
Principals encourage teamwork among staff	213	3.07	.70	Agree
Principals appraise teachers' performance regularly.	213	2.86	.80	Agree
Principals' appraisal of teachers is used for teachers' promotion.	213	2.51	.74	Agree
Principal's performance evaluation through classroom observation is used to provide feedback to improve teaching practices.	213	2.75	.66	Agree
Principals strive to improve work environment.	213	3.15	.60	Agree
Principals mediate conflicts among teachers, students, parents, and the community.	213	3.02	.73	Agree
Principals offer some non-monetary incentives to motivate teachers.	213	2.85	.78	Agree

Benchmark = 2.50

Given a benchmark of 2.50 on the 4-point rating scale, the data in the table above indicates that timely payment of teachers' salary, efforts to improve the work environment, proper certificate screening before employment, encouragement of teamwork among staff, regular appraisal of teachers' performance, appraisal of teachers' performance used for promotion, appraisal of teachers' performance through classroom observation used for feedback to improve performance, mediation of conflicts, using non-monetary incentives to motivate teachers posted mean scores of 3.39, 3.13, 3.12, 3.07, 2.86, 2.51, 2.75, 2.85 and 3.02 respectively indicating that the respondents agree that these are clear human resource management practices in public secondary schools as their mean scores are above the benchmark of 2.50. Conversely, payment of bonus to hardworking teachers (mean = 1.55), principals playing a significant role in staff recruitment and employment (mean = 1.74), teachers being sent for training (mean = 2.09), vacant positions being duly advertised (mean = 2.12), in-house training organised by principals (mean = 2.19), Teachers being posted to schools at the request of principals (mean = 2.21), and principals playing a significant role in staff promotion (Mean = 2.37) had mean scores below the benchmark of 2.50

indicating that the respondents disagreed that these items are human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

The grand mean of the items combined is approximately 2.73, indicating that the items are a fair representation of the human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta state. The standard deviation is 0.74, suggesting moderate variability in responses across the different items.

Research Question 2: *What are the indices of economic recession in public secondary schools in Delta State?*

Table 2: Mean Score and Standard Deviation Analysis on Indices of Economic recession in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State as perceived by Principals.

Descriptive Statistics

ITEMS	N	Mean	SD	Remark
There is budget cut in public secondary schools because of reduced government funding.	213	3.12	.78	Agree
There is increase in class sizes because of fewer teachers in public secondary schools.	213	3.24	.66	Agree
Extracurricular activities and special education programmes are reduced or eliminated in public secondary schools.	213	3.00	.71	Agree
School infrastructures are not properly maintained because of lack of funds in public secondary schools.	213	3.87	.33	Agree
Textbooks/learning materials are not or rarely made available to students because of no funds.	211	3.37	.50	Agree
Prevalence of higher Student-Teacher ratios in public secondary schools leading to fall in academic performance of students.	213	3.24	.83	Agree
No purchasing of new technologies because of lack of funds.	213	3.50	.71	Agree
Increased reliance on fundraising to run public secondary schools.	213	3.26	.83	Agree
Reduced professional development of teachers because of lack of funds in public secondary schools.	213	3.13	.93	Agree
Increase in parents defaulting in payment of their children's school fees.	213	3.25	.83	Agree
Increase in incidence of children withdrawing from school because their parents can't afford sending them to school.	213	3.38	.69	Agree
Prevalence of staff underemployment in public secondary schools where some staff accept jobs below their qualifications.	213	3.50	.70	Agree
Increase in cases of students coming to school hungry and therefore unable to concentrate.	213	3.50	.50	Agree
Many students in public secondary schools are not able to afford most of the recommended textbooks because of inflation.	213	3.75	.43	Agree
Many students come late to school because of trekking to school as they cannot afford high cost of transportation.	213	3.37	1.00	Agree
Many students in public secondary schools come to school with worn out uniforms as they cannot afford new ones.	213	3.75	.43	Agree

Benchmark = 2.50

Source: Field Work 2024 (SPSS Analysis 27)

The data in table 2 above indicates that all items had mean ratings above the benchmark, suggesting that respondents recognize these indicators as significant issues related to economic recession in public secondary schools in Delta State. The grand mean of the items combined is approximately 3.20, reflecting a strong consensus on the adverse impacts of economic recession on school operations and student welfare. The standard deviation across the items is 0.66, indicating moderate variability in responses, but

overall agreement on the seriousness of these issues. Among the indicators, the item regarding poor maintenance of school infrastructure (mean = 3.87) received the highest rating, indicating a particularly strong concern among respondents. Similarly, students' inability to afford recommended textbooks (mean = 3.75) and students coming to school with worn-out uniforms (mean = 3.75) also highlight critical areas impacted by economic recession. Conversely, the item concerning the reduction or elimination of extracurricular activities (mean = 2.99) was the lowest but still above the benchmark, suggesting that while this is a concern, it may not be as pressing as other issues. The findings demonstrate a comprehensive acknowledgment of the economic challenges faced by public secondary schools, reflecting a pressing need for intervention and support to address these significant issues.

Research Question 3: *What are the transformative impacts of current economic recession on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State?*

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation Analysis on Transformative impacts of the Current Economic Recession on Human Resource Management Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State as Perceived by Principals

Descriptive Statistics

ITEMS	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Many teachers have been sacked by the Delta State Government in public schools because of poor economic situation	213	1.46	.73	Disagree
Embargo was placed on employment of teachers by the Delta State Government because of economic recession leading to staff shortage.	213	2.95	.83	Agree
Teachers are being owed salaries because of economic recession in Delta State.	213	1.62	.80	Disagree
Teachers are denied regular training and staff development because of economic recession.	213	2.60	.81	Agree
Teachers' salaries have been reduced in the state because of economic recession.	213	1.69	.86	Disagree
Retiring teachers are owed their retirement benefits in the state.	213	3.66	.52	Agree
Teachers are owed Promotion arrears in the state because of economic recession.	213	2.88	1.01	Agree
End of year party for teachers is a thing of the past in public secondary schools in the state because of economic recession.	213	3.20	.89	Agree
Teachers are made to teach larger classes because of shortage of staff in public secondary schools in Delta State.	213	3.56	.50	Agree
The state government is more keen on reducing staff strength and therefore stricter about certificate screening for teachers in public secondary schools.	213	2.70	.86	Agree
The government is stricter on retirement age of staff, to ensure that those due for retirement are promptly retired because of economic recession.	213	2.82	.85	Agree
Teachers are more easily sacked for committing an offence in the state because of economic recession	213	1.74	.76	Disagree

Benchmark = 2.50

Source: Field Work 2024 (SPSS Analysis 27)

The data in the table indicates that several items related to the transformative impacts of the economic recession on human resource management practices in public secondary schools have mean ratings both above and below the benchmark, suggesting a mixed recognition of these issues by respondents. The overall grand mean of the items combined is approximately 2.41, reflecting a moderate concern regarding the impact of economic recession on human resource management practices. The standard deviation across the items is 0.69, indicating some variability in responses but a general consensus on the significance of these impacts.

Specifically, eight items out of the twelve items had mean scores above the benchmark. Retiring teachers being owed retirement benefits (mean = 3.66) being the highest, followed by teachers being made to teach larger classes because of shortage of staff (mean = 3.55), end of year parties becoming a thing of the past (mean = 3.19), embargo placed on employment (mean = 2.95), teachers being owed promotion arrears

(mean = 2.87), the government being keen on reducing staff strength and therefore stricter about certificate screening (2.70) and teachers being denied training (mean = 2.60). It therefore means that the respondents agree that these items are areas where human resource management practices have been affected by the economic recession. On the other hand the four items whose mean ratings fell below the benchmark of 2.50 are as follows starting with the lowest, sacking of many teachers because of economic recession (mean = 1.46), teachers being owed salaries (mean = 1.62), teachers salary being reduced because of economic recession (mean = 1.69), and teachers being easily sacked for committing an offence (1.73). This clearly indicates that respondents disagreed with the notion that teachers were sacked, owed salaries or had their salaries reduced because of economic recession.

Hypothesis One (H₀₁): Economic recession has no effect on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 6: Linear Regression Analysis for Hypothesis one

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		T	Sig.	Decision
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	43.215	3.823			11.305	.000	No
	Indices of Economic Recession	-.043	.075	-.040		-.580	.562	significant Relationship, accept H ₀₁

R² = .002; F(1, 211 model) = 0.337, P-value for F = (0.562)

a. Dependent Variable: Human Resource Management Practice

Source: Field Work, 2024

The regression results (Table 6) revealed an R² of 0.002, indicating that economic recession accounts for only 0.2% of the variance in human resource management practices, a negligible amount. The ANOVA results showed that the model was not statistically significant (F(1, 211) = 0.337, p = 0.562) suggesting that economic recession does not significantly predict human resource management practices in this context. The regression coefficient for the independent variable, economic recession (Indices of Economic Recession), was -0.043 (p = 0.562), indicating that fluctuations in the economic recession variable do not lead to meaningful changes in human resource management practices among public secondary schools. In light of this analysis, the null hypothesis (H₀) is upheld: economic recession does not have a significant effect on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypothesis Two (H₀₂): There is no significant relationship between the transformative impact of economic recession and human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 7: Linear Regression Analysis for Hypothesis Two

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		T	Sig.	Decision
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	39.116	2.616			14.952	.000	No significant
	Transformative Impact of Economic Recession	.061	.084	.050		.733	.464	relationship, accept H ₀₂

R² = .003; F (1, 211) = 0.537, P-value for F = (0.464)

a. Dependent Variable: Human Resource Management Practice

Source: Field Work, 2024

The regression results (Table 7) indicated an R^2 of 0.003, suggesting that Transformative Impact of Economic Recession accounts for only 0.3% of the variance in Human resource Management Practices, which is a minimal amount. The ANOVA results showed that the model was not statistically significant ($F(1, 211) = 0.537, p = 0.464$), indicating that The Transformative Impact of Economic Recession does not significantly predict Human Resource Management Practices in public secondary schools in Delta State in this context. The regression coefficient for Transformative Impact of Economic Recession was 0.061 ($p = 0.464$), reflecting that changes in the transformative impact of economic recession do not lead to meaningful changes in human resource management practices among public secondary schools. In light of this analysis, the null hypothesis (H_0) is upheld: there is no significant relationship between the transformative impact of economic recession and human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings indicate that human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State include structured processes such as staff recruitment and selection, catering for welfare of staff, and development of teachers. On staff recruitment and selection, proper certificate screening is carried out in the process of recruitment and selection to ensure that only qualified candidates are selected. However, a low mean rating for vacancies being duly advertised in the newspaper and radio (mean 2.12) shows respondents' dissatisfaction with the recruitment process. Improper advertisement of vacancies could mean many backdoor employments into the system driven by nepotism in line with the observation by Wichenje, Simatra, Okuom & Kegode (2012) in their study. The findings also indicate that principals play very insignificant role in the recruitment and selection process as mean ratings on principal's role in the employment of teachers (1.74) and in the posting of teachers to schools (2.21) were low.

Respondents' agreement on timely payment of salary (mean 3.39), principals striving to improve the work environment (3.15), and principals mediating conflicts among teachers, students, parents and the community (mean 3.02) which are all in the domain of staff welfare indicate a strong agreement with human resource management practices geared towards ensuring the welfare of staff financially, socially and emotionally in public secondary schools in Delta State. This will ensure proper maintenance and integration of staff to enable them achieve school goals in line with the view of Omebe (2014).

On development of teachers, mean ratings on principal's performance evaluation through classroom observation being used to provide feedback to improve teaching practices (2.75) and principals' appraisal of teachers' performance being used for promotion (2.51) show that there is some form of informal staff development and training to improve their teaching skills. However, respondents disagreed that there is any structured training or development as mean scores on sending teachers for training (2.09) and in-service training and mentoring (2.19) were below the benchmark.

The grand mean of 2.73 reflects a generally positive outlook on HR practices despite challenges, and a standard deviation of 0.74 shows moderate variability, indicating that while respondents agree on the importance of HR practices, the implementation is inconsistent. This result aligns with previous studies, such as Buah et al. (2020), which found that public secondary schools in times of economic constraints tend to focus more on essential HR functions, but struggle with areas like staff promotions and training, which often receive less attention during recessions.

The findings also revealed that economic recession manifests in the schools through several indicators having to do with reduction in the financial capacity of the government, parents and other stakeholders to properly fund education because of fall in income and high inflation rate. As revealed in table 2, all the items listed had mean ratings above the bench mark ranging from improper provision and maintenance of school infrastructure, inability of students to buy recommended textbooks, inability of students to replace worn out uniforms, increase in cases of students coming to school hungry, prevalence of staff under-employment, non-purchase of new technologies in schools, increase in students' withdrawal from schools because their parents cannot afford it, many students trekking and coming late to school because of high cost of transportation, non/sparse provision of learning materials by the government, increased reliance on

fundraising to run schools, higher student-teacher ratio in schools, increased class sizes because of non-employment of new teachers, reduced professional development of teachers, budget cuts in schools, to reduction in extracurricular activities and special education programmes. The grand mean across all the items is 3.20 indicating that the respondents strongly agreed that all these aforementioned items which are all tell-tale signs of economic recession are rife in public secondary schools in Delta State.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Adeyemi (as cited by Nwabianke and Igoni, 2017) which showed that during economic recessions, public secondary schools experience sharp declines in resources and infrastructure maintenance. It also corroborates the assertion of Yenle (2017) that the government reduces staff strength by placing embargo on employment during economic recession leading to shortage of staff. This situation forces schools to rely heavily on the available workforce which is stretched thin, worsening the working conditions of teachers as stated by Ogunode (2021). This finding as it concerns some students withdrawing from school and others coming to school hungry agrees with the assertion by the World Bank (2023) that during economic recession poor families adjust by leaving out essential services like education and cutting back on daily nutrition.

The findings also revealed that the current economic recession had some transformative impacts on human resource management practices in public secondary schools in Delta State. These impacts as perceived by respondents are reflected in items on table 3 that had mean ratings above the benchmark. These are (in descending order) retiring teachers being owed retirement benefits, teachers being made to teach larger classes because of shortage of staff, end of year parties becoming a thing of the past, embargo placed on employment leading to shortage of staff, teachers being owed promotion arrears, government being stricter on retirement age of staff to ensure those due for retirement are promptly retired, stricter routine certificate screening to weed out staff with fake certificates to reduce staff strength, and teachers being denied regular training and staff development. The grand mean of 3.00 reflects an overall agreement that the economic downturn has impacted HRM practices in terms of recruitment, retention, and staff welfare as indicated in the aforementioned items.

The findings also revealed that respondents disagreed with three items on table 3 which had mean ratings way below the benchmark. These items include sacking of teachers, teachers being owed salaries, reduction of teachers' salaries, and teachers being more easily sacked for committing offenses. This indicates a rather 'Soft' HRM approach in the face of economic recession, where sacking of staff is off the table but rather seeking how to maintain the available staff by supporting and motivating them socially and psychologically. This supports the assertion by Edvardsson and Durst (2021) which states that organisations either adopt 'Soft' or 'Hard' HRM approach during economic recession.

This result also aligns with the findings of Runhaar (2016), which suggested that HR practices in non-profit organizations, such as schools, are heavily affected by financial constraints, often resulting in reduced training and delayed promotions. Similarly, Elujekwute (2021) noted that during recessions, schools are less able to support professional development, which demotivates staff and affects job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Human resources management practices in public secondary schools are essential factor in maintaining educational standards, especially during periods of economic downturn. The study found that while the recession did not drastically alter existing Human Resources Management practices, it did force school leaders to adopt various coping strategies. These strategies helped schools manage with fewer resources, ensuring that essential functions continued. Thus, the findings suggest that resourceful leadership is among the arsenal used in overcoming the challenges posed by financial constraints during economic recessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. School administrators should receive continual training on effective human resources management strategies, particularly in resource-limited environments which is often referred to as capacity Building.
2. Policymakers should ensure that schools are better funded, especially during economic recessions, to prevent the deterioration of Human Resources Management practices and school infrastructure.
3. Principals should consider continuous implementation of non-monetary rewards to motivate staff during financially constrained periods. This could include leadership roles, recognition programs, and professional development opportunities.
4. Schools should adopt more efficient financial management practices, ensuring that available resources are prioritized toward maintaining essential Human Resource Management functions such as teacher training and school infrastructure.
5. Schools should regularly assess the effectiveness of the Human Resources Management strategies they employ during periods of economic difficulty, enabling them to make necessary adjustments based on feedback from staff and stakeholders.

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